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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [OPRC](#) [KPAO](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: ARMENIAN NEWSPAPER PRESSES ALMOST STOP ROLLING

REF: YEREVAN 1529

(U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) Armenia's leading printing company announced on December 1 that it had run out of newsprint and would cease printing Armenian newspapers December 6. The company said it could no longer import paper due to Russia's closure of the Upper Lars checkpoint on the Georgian border, as well as the weather-related suspension of a ferryboat line running from Ilichevsk in Ukraine to Poti in Georgia. However, on December 5 the company announced that the Ilichevsk-Poti route had re-opened and the printing house would only close for about a week while it waited for the newsprint to arrive. Newspaper editors have voiced concern, with one blaming Armenian authorities for not creating better relations with Armenia's neighbors, and another blaming Russia for closing its border with Georgia. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Vrezh Markosyan, director of the Tigran Mets printing house, told us that due to the closure of the Upper Lars checkpoint, 150 tons of newsprint that was supposed to be delivered to Armenia was initially stuck in Vladikavkaz, Russia. According to him, after Russia closed the checkpoint due to disagreements with Georgia, the company decided to send its paper through Ilichevsk to Poti. Markosyan told us that the ferry route was subsequently closed due to inclement weather conditions, leaving 220 tons of newsprint stranded in Ilichevsk. However, the Ilichevsk-Poti ferryboat route re-opened on December 5, and the newsprint was to be shipped December 6. Markosyan estimated that it would take 10-11 days for the newsprint to arrive, leaving the print house without paper for approximately 7-8 days. The majority of newspaper directors said they would pay extra to have Armenia's second printing house publish their newspapers while Tigran Mets was closed. The directors of Hayastani Hanrapetutian and Novoye Vremya newspapers, however, told us they had not decided whether their newspapers would be printed during this time.

¶3. (U) A number of newspaper editors published articles expressing concern about the situation. Nicol Pashinyan, editor of Haykakan Zhamanak newspaper, blamed Russia, writing sarcastically that, "Armenia's links with the rest of the world are being restricted step by step by our 'strategic partner Russia.'" Aravot newspaper editor Aram Abrahamyan also wrote an editorial, saying that while he did not believe the Armenian government had deliberately created the situation to restrict the freedom of the press, he blamed Armenia's leadership for not maintaining normal relations with the country's neighbors and for failing to end the "blockade" of the country (meaning Armenia's sealed borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan). Abrahamyan commented that while today Armenia has a shortage of newsprint, tomorrow it could have a shortage of fuel or grain. Hakob Avedikyan, editor of Azg newspaper, stated that the situation

showed that Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian was mistaken when he said that Armenia could develop for another century without the Turkish and Azerbaijani borders being opened to trade. (NOTE: Importers in other sectors are successfully sending products to and from Russia, but report a 30 percent or greater increase in transportation costs (reftel). END NOTE.)

COMMENT

14. (SBU) Armenia's main printing house running out of newsprint is a telling example of Armenia's vulnerability to the political situation between its neighbors and the impact of its geographical isolation and closed borders. While the press and some members of government continue to speculate about the negative impact of the Russian-Georgian border closure, most businesses have been able to find alternate transportation routes. For industries which are locked into specific shipping routes, however, the potential impact remains serious, as this case shows.

GODFREY